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AN EXPERIMENT IN TEACHING LATIN FOR THE SAKE OF ENGLISH

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The experiment that I am describing today is not one of those carefully thought-out scientific investigations which presupposes just so many hours' work, just so many students, just so much work to be done by each on just such lines, as if each student were an unvarying quantity, reacting according to foreseen formulas in foreknown directions. It is rather a bit of opportunism, taken up light-heartedly, with the purpose of interesting and helping to develop intellectually some boys and girls who are alike only in differing widely in some important particulars from certain other classes of pupils with which you and I are very familiar. Their case seemed to cry aloud for a departure, and we departed.

This class is now in the second year of high school. I have taught it from the beginning, that is to say, I have taught certain members of it, for the personnel of the class is mixed in origin.

After this introduction you will not picture to yourselves a row of eager students of the material of which Masters of Arts and Doctors of Philosophy are made. Quite the contrary. The nucleus of the class was a division of girls of the course in household arts. These are honest hard-working students, not gifted in language. A few of them have fairly good capacity Latinward. I have often speculated as to whether any one of them could win a "B" in any ordinary Caesar class, but I think it very doubtful. Nevertheless they are well-meaning and attractive little girls whose achievements in the line of bread-making, canning, and kindred arts leave nothing to be desired.

This nucleus, however, is a mere nucleus. Added to it are a number of boys who dropped in during their first year because they could not keep up with the classes that were taking Latin

with a more scholarly end in view. Perhaps I mean with a more classical scholarly end in view. These dropped in at my request and I ought to say that contemporaneously certain other pupils of keener mentality dropped out, also at my request, into the classical divisions. For I am a firm believer, like the rest of you no doubt, in adapting the pupil to the work and the work to the pupil. A boy or girl who will not open his mouth in a talented class will often prove an interested and interesting student in a class in which he does not feel himself at a disadvantage.

After about six weeks of the present year had passed—shortly following our influenza vacation—I invited the teachers of the five Caesar classes to weed out their backward students, sending me the hopeless cases. This gave me quite an addition in numbers, so that now my class consists of more than twenty students.

Are you losing interest entirely? Does it seem to you that I have no right to take the time of this *gravissimum orbis terrarum concilium* in telling a tale of students who are confessedly odds and ends?

O illustrissimae conlegae, an experience of twenty-six years of teaching has shown me that our most successful business men, the aldermen and councilmen of our municipalities, not to mention a few public servants higher up, are very largely recruited from the boys of just such classes; and that their wives, the mothers of the coming generation, are inevitably to be found among the girls. Leading citizens of the future may and often do come from other classes; they are *always* present in backward classes. Therefore you will please consider my somewhat unpromising lot of boys and girls as part of the very bone and sinew of the state that is to be.

If another argument for the importance of my class were needed it is found in the fact that less gifted students require more care and thought if they are to get the education that we, paid servants of the republic, are in duty bound to help them to acquire. A genius or a near-genius will help himself to education in spite of obstacles—*vide* Lincoln—but a dull mind has to be awakened and must be carefully given such mental pabulum as it can assimilate.

It happened that some of these students who were transferred from other classes, being well known to themselves and their fellows as not precisely stars in the educational firmament, perceived the trend of events, and I actually caught a handsome fellow, more than six feet tall, patting himself on the head, as he stood in the corridor, and announcing that he had been transferred to the fool class. Not the least in the world. I soon taught him better than that.

I have explained to the class from the very first that they are taking part in an interesting experiment in education and that it is both a privilege and an honor to do so. I don't teach "fool" classes myself; I doubt if I could. But I find much stimulus in teaching an experimental class, and my girls and boys respond nobly and take themselves seriously. An air of pride and of conscious importance makes itself felt when a visitor appears—and we have a great many visitors—which is very different from the look of shame and terror which will spread over the faces of students who feel themselves inferior. It is worth while to see some such students rise with evident pride and give with a fine air of importance some of their discoveries as to the relationships between Latin and English. The discovery may not be very important, but the change from being a blockhead to being a star I verily believe is.

I have tried many different methods with them, abandoning some that at first looked promising, finding unexpected success with others which were undertaken as mere makeshifts and hence developing these latter from day to day, turning, doubling on my tracks, but always getting ahead after a fashion, accomplishing something every day.

We began last fall with *Fabulae Faciles* and succeeded in reading about half of the book during the first semester. There were times when I felt that our achievement in translation was too absurdly small and that my class must be shirking or they could more easily and readily render into English the very simple stories in that book. I changed my mind when I collected the books, which had been new at the opening of the year. Every page that we had taken up in class was worn; every line showed the

prints of hard-working if not immaculate fingers. The books that a brilliant class has used for a year will sometimes look as if they had been casually read through once.

Since February 11 we have read Caesar, beginning with the invasion of Britain (Book IV, chap. 20). Each student has a notebook in which is written as a foreword, "Our object is to increase our knowledge of English by studying Latin. We will try to find as many English words as possible from *different* Latin words." We read this aloud occasionally in order to keep our purpose in mind and someone always gives it when a visitor is present. It focuses the student's interest and he can always tell just why *he* is studying Latin.

Next we lettered a few pages (taking a leaf from Mr. Perkins' book) using twenty-one letters and leaving four pages to each. For some time thereafter we put interesting words into this notebook. Three or four students would be detailed to get five or six words each, derived from Latin words in the advance lesson. We did not search out the root nor even—horrendum!—the first form grammatically, but took merely the actual form on the printed page. I encouraged the class to talk about these English words, and when any particularly interesting one appeared we all borrowed it and it went into every notebook, opposite the Latin word from which it is derived. I did not permit different parts of speech derived from the same word to be used. The first time the notebooks were handed in they were to contain an entry under each letter and not fewer than one hundred words in all. Nearly every book overran; the banner one contained three hundred and thirty-six words.

Next we tried "word histories." I gave the class a model to start with and I subjoin a few specimens of their work. You will not need to be assured that these are given just as they were written.

"Coagulate is an English verb from the Latin verb *cogo*, meaning to collect or drive together; therefore coagulate means by derivation to collect and its especial meaning is to thicken. Example: Rennet coagulates milk."

This, of course, was written by a girl in the household arts course.

"Concurrent is a noun [alas!] from the Latin verb *concurro* meaning to run together which is made up of *con* (part of *cum*) meaning together, with, and *curro* meaning running, therefore concurrent means by derivation running together. Example: concurrent lines are lines that run together."

"Refugee is a noun, taken from the Latin verb *refugio* which is made up of *re* meaning back and *fugio* meaning to flee. Therefore it means by derivation to flee back and changed to a noun one who flees back. Its special meaning as a verb is refuge and as a noun is refugee. Example: The refugee came from Servia."

"Intermission is a noun from the Latin noun *intermitto*. It is made up of *inter*, between and *mitto* send. It means therefore by derivation send between. Its special meaning is to send between the space of the action of two things. Example: the intermission between the pictures was very short indeed."

I have taught English just as many years and nearly as many hours as Latin, and I have, therefore, a first-hand knowledge of the vague and indefinite sense in which the slow student—and not he alone—uses English words. The importance of a discriminating knowledge of the precise meaning of words cannot be overestimated. Our achievements in that line, as you have seen, are not brilliant, but I maintain that they are not without value.

As another exercise each member of the class takes his turn at getting all the English words that he can find derived from words in one chapter of Caesar, and puts them into his notebook to be read in class. I find that he has to be warned to bring not fewer than twenty nor more than forty. Thus we guard against sloth and too great zeal. Of course occasionally a wrong derivation appears, for example *beat* from *beata* and *clam* from *clam*. This last was given up with great reluctance.

One day I displayed to the class a Sabin chart made last year, containing Milton's definition of Education: "I call, therefore, a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." We considered carefully each word of Latin origin and noted that *offices* meant *duties*. I was

really pleased to see that several private notebooks came out—not those to be handed in—into which the definition was copied without suggestion on my part.

As to the disadvantages of my experiment, let me confess quite openly that I have found it impossible to teach Latin syntax with any degree of thoroughness and still keep English as my main object. Yet manifestly we cannot teach Latin at all without some syntax; therefore we spend some time on it nearly every day. We have successfully learned to recognize ablative absolutes and relations of place; a few of us can recognize ablatives of time, manner, and separation. We all know *cum*-temporal clauses, and, with less sureness, *cum*-causal and concessive. We are supposed to know the difference between clauses of purpose and result, but, to be perfectly frank with you, we usually have to have a hint that the construction is one or the other. We are quite strong on indirect discourse and have even written a few Latin sentences to illustrate its principles. We know with tolerable certainty an infinitive when we see it, an imperfect subjunctive, and the third person singular and plural of a few tenses of the indicative. Some few of us can recognize the gerundive of necessity, and, if you will come and visit us, I shall even dare to ask a few to distinguish between a gerund and a gerundive.

Are you shocked beyond words at the yawning chasms indicated only too plainly by this list?

Let us come back for a moment to the personal equation: Two of my boys take an active and responsible part in their respective fathers' business, even occasionally going out of town on business trips. Another is a public singer. Seldom does a week pass without my seeing his name in the paper in connection with some entertainment. Another boy belongs to an orchestra which apparently performs chiefly in small towns at a little distance from our city. Others are employed out of school but less strenuously; a few of them probably earn more than their own living expenses. Nearly all of the girls have household cares at home; two are quite frankly butterflies, but, unlike La Fontaine's Cigale, they manage to store up a little grain for use in recitation and examination. Another little girl is very slow, very delicate in health, and

very conscientious. She is so happy in this class, so proud to think she can actually keep her place in it by her own efforts, that I love to see her bright face.

Do you really suppose that the cause of sound learning would be better furthered by giving these pupils work that they cannot do and then conditioning them? If so, I do not agree with you. Do you really suppose that they would carry away with them into their future careers—which I foresee will not be too humble—a more helpful recollection of their Latin course if, instead of writing derivatives, we conjugated verbs? I do not. Those verbs would never, never be conjugated correctly and the memory of them would be bitter if not nauseating. I confidently expect, if I live fifteen years longer, to receive words of appreciation from leading citizens of what they learned in this class.

On the other hand consider for a moment the classes that have been relieved by the withdrawal of some of my beloved students. I do not need to remind you what a dead weight a student is who cannot understand and cannot keep up. He is of no use to himself and of great disadvantage to his fellows. He is his teacher's nightmare. The principal of our school once said to me, naming five of my choicest spirits, "You don't know what it is to me to see those students actually interested in their work and getting something out of it." We must build with the blocks we have.

When my class began Caesar they did neither better nor worse in the matter of translation than they had been doing in *Fabulae Faciles*. At present they are doing somewhat better, but nothing to brag of. Yet more than half of them read at sight with considerable ease. They do not seem to be able to work the meaning out alone nearly so well. I do not attribute this wholly or even chiefly to laziness, however. One of the characteristics of immaturity is lack of power to put things together. On the other hand, it is not a bad sign to be able to translate well at sight; if a student translates fluently in class and cannot read at sight we old schoolma'ams know just what to think.

Do I consider my experiment successful? I certainly do. The students in this class have learned something of the great language

which is the foundation of so many European tongues. They have learned by first-hand knowledge that it furnishes at least half the structural material of our own. They perceive that English words have certain fundamental meanings which are derived from words belonging to the speech of a people who flourished more than two thousand years ago, and thus something of the continuity of history is disclosed to them, together with a little philological knowledge, which, though it be neither as deep as a well nor as wide as a church door, will yet, I verily believe, be enough to help them discern more clearly, as they journey through life, the beauty and the force of their own language. It will teach them to use that language with greater intelligence and precision. It will give them a background. The aim of teaching Latin as of teaching everything else is to train our youth to the best possible citizenship, and I believe that my little experiment in teaching Latin for the sake of English will have a humble share in carrying that great purpose into effect.